

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

The effects upon the Roman Catholic Church of the entrance of Italy into the war in association with Nazi paganism are unforeseeable, but will certainly be profound. The whole Christian Church is experiencing a crisis in its inner life and beliefs, its outward organisation and its relation to society, such as it has not known for centuries.

The freedom-loving peoples are facing not one but two great perils. The threat to the values which they cherish is arousing them to every effort of which they are capable. But precisely in this necessary concentration of effort there lies an immense danger. It is that in the intensity of the struggle to repel the external menace their moral and spiritual energies may become exhausted, so that they will lack the power for the creative tasks which will be not less exacting than the war itself. Can the military effort be matched by a corresponding effort in the spiritual sphere? On the answer to that question everything depends.

Behind the war on land and sea and air there is going on all the time at an unseen and deeper level a more important conflict between the forces of life and those of death. The latter seem to be sweeping all before them. It is in the deep region of our being in which we come into contact with the infinite life of God that faith can triumph over fear and life-giving energies be released that can stem and reverse the tide of swelling destruction. No words could pierce more deeply to the heart of the present situation than those of the writer of the book of Deuteronomy:

"I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live: to love the Lord thy God, to obey His voice, and to cleave unto Him; for He is thy life."

PRAYER AND DELIVERANCE

There is evidence that the evacuation of the Allied armies from Flanders was experienced by many who took part in it as a miraculous intervention of Providence, and is associated in their minds with the national day of prayer which immediately preceded it. It is these unexpected and inexplicable happenings that awaken in men's minds a sense of the mystery of existence and of the operation of forces beyond human calculation.

We must be on our guard, however, against a too naïve interpretation of the connection between our prayers and the deliverance granted to us. Beside the mystery of answered prayers we have to set the mystery of unanswered prayers. Prayer is not one among other natural causes. If it were, science could determine its relative importance among those causes, and it would be the business of the High Command to provide for it along with its orders for munitions. On the other hand, it is a fact of religious experience, as many who took part in the recent evacuation have come to know, that when we have prayed and truly committed our lives and fortunes into God's hands, the events

which happen to us are charged with a new meaning. The succour which comes to us has a personal quality. The experience is suffused with an awareness of God. We know with a deep certainty that the deliverance comes from Him.

Through prayer, as Professor Hodges reminded us (C.N.-L. Supplement No. 27), we enter into a new order or dimension of reality. The relation between the world of things with its chain of cause and effect, which it is the function of science to investigate and enable us to control, and the sphere of free, personal relations in which we experience the Fatherly love, protection and deliverance of God remains a mystery. The two are intimately connected. The laws of the world of time and space are the same for the religious man and the irreligious; the sun rises and the rain falls on the good and the evil alike. But there is another plane of existence in which as persons we respond to the unconditional demand and experience the effective succour of a personal God. To those who enter into it everything that happens appears in a fresh light.

Those of you who would like to understand more fully what is meant by different dimensions of reality will find an illuminating treatment of the subject in Karl Heim's *God Transcendent* (Nisbet, 11s.). The best recent discussion that I know of providence, miracle and prayer is that by H. H. Farmer (who acknowledges his debt to Heim) in *The World and God* (Nisbet, 11s.6d.).

THE OCCUPATION OF HOLLAND

You will be interested in the following extracts from a private letter addressed by one of our Dutch members to his friends in other countries:

"What has happened in Holland is so unimaginable that I do not pretend to understand it. The Dutch were not unaware of the possibility of an attack, but since they had not been engaged in any war for more than a century, the danger had not really entered into our bones. It seemed so utterly meaningless that a country with which we had entertained such deep relations in all realms of life, and with which we had no quarrel, should suddenly, without even pretending to have a good reason, try to destroy us.

"And then it came. And it was different from anything which we had thought of. For it was not the clean battle which Holland was ready to accept. It was an unprecedented combination of treason and barbarism. The thousands of Germans to whom we had given hospitality began to shoot their hosts. German soldiers in Dutch uniforms tricked our soldiers at strategic points. Cold-blooded and devilishly systematic bombardment of civilians set in. Our Queen and Princesses were ruthlessly attacked and persecuted by bombers. It was not war. It was something for which man has yet to discover the word.

"I try to imagine constantly what is now going on in the hearts and minds of the Dutch. For the moment they are surely stunned. They will not and cannot believe that all that Holland has stood for in the world is simply wiped out. But they will begin to ask questions of themselves. Were we not too sure of ourselves? Were we not too secure? Has not even our official Christianity been an all too safe kind of Christianity? Is it not time that we learn to suffer as so many peoples have learned to suffer in these last years? Is our soil not being ploughed in order that a better seed may grow out of it?

"If the next few weeks do not bring us a disaster which means the end of Europe—which God may avert—the suffering of Holland, indeed the agony of all Europe may yet prove to have a tremendous meaning. It may teach us to *live* what we have professed."

One of the terrible things in the invasion of Holland was the treachery, not only

of the Germans who were guests in the country, but of a number of the Dutch people themselves. This decay of natural loyalty, which has its parallels in other countries, is one of the sinister features of modern society. It shows the extent of the disintegration of the bonds that hold a community together.

THE CHURCH IN GERMANY

Information about the Churches in Germany is hard to come by. An article on the subject appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* of May 24th. I have been able to check and supplement the information contained in it with evidence from other sources.

The attitude of the Evangelical Church to the National Socialist régime has undergone a change since the war. While the claims of the Church have not been abandoned in principle, the conflict with the State has been subordinated to the need for national unity. The view taken by Church leaders has been that outstanding issues must be held in abeyance and that the Church must demonstrate its loyalty to the Government. The Government on its side is not disposed to press matters too far.

The position in regard to Pastor Niemoeller is, I understand, that he offered early in the war to serve in a submarine, and then withdrew the offer. A little later he renewed it only to meet with a somewhat sharp rejection.

Whatever support the Church as a whole may be giving to the Government, it is certain that there are Christians in Germany—how many cannot be known—who remain loyal to the universal Church which transcends national differences, and who have been deeply pained by the German treatment of neutral countries. They have no power, however, to influence the policy of the Government.

The attitude of the Roman Catholic Church is reported to be similar. The majority of the higher ranks of the Catholic clergy desire a German victory. What they look forward to eventually is a Catholic-Conservative restoration. Assurances have been given by the authorities in regard to the position of the Church in the Bohemian-Moravian protectorate, in Poland and in Germany itself. The change of attitude in the Church has been helped by disquiet among the clergy in regard to the growing tendencies towards Bolshevism. It is feared that a Bolshevisation of Germany might be carried out by the Nazis themselves.

The pastorals of the Roman Catholic Bishops, however, which have been quoted in recent months in *The Tablet*, suggest that there are considerable differences of attitude among the Church leaders. Some of the Bishops have been outspoken in their condemnation of the new paganism; among them Cardinal Faulhaber, who is now unfortunately a sick man. Some of the other prelates are working closely with the Nazis.

In judging of the attitude of Christians in Germany to the war we have to bear in mind what was said last week about the strength of the motive of love of fatherland, fear of the Party and the insidious and almost irresistible effect of unresting propaganda.

RETALIATION

As the war becomes more intense the demand for reprisals grows in strength. A long and consistent Christian tradition has insisted on the inviolability of the civilian population in war. With the coming of totalitarian war a large proportion of civilians, e.g., the makers of munitions, have become combatants. The destruction of munitions before they reach the field of battle would seem to be as legitimate a military objective as their destruction in the hands of troops; and when this is attempted from the air the incidental loss of civilian life is unavoidable.

The real issue is whether an attack is made without regard to military objectives

from motives of revenge or for the purpose of terrorisation or from sheer wantonness on those who are in no sense combatants and, as in the case of children, wholly innocent. Such action is for Christians simply and absolutely wrong. The *Osservatore Romano* at the outbreak of the war said in language that doubtless had the approval of the Pope and is not a whit too strong:

"The law of retaliation applied to those unarmed, to women and children and the aged—one has only to think of it, only to formulate it, to arouse in every soul an unequalled horror, to find oneself powerless in any language to express its shameful, accursed meaning."

The inconsistencies of the human mind are inexhaustible. Otherwise it would be inexplicable how it can be held at the same time that we are fighting the war to rid the world of the terrible scourge of Nazism and that it is permissible for us to imitate the brutalities which arouse our horror when they are enacted in Belgium and France. Those who can say "Let *their* children have a taste of it," or let such a remark pass unchallenged, have gone over to Nazi paganism. That such lapses are possible is due to the decay of belief in a righteous God. The recovery of that belief is vital for the future of civilisation. For those to whom it is real, the indictment of the apostle is unanswerable:

"Wherefore thou art without excuse, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest dost practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against them that practice such things. . . For there is no respect of persons with God."

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The National Assembly of the Church of England gave its approval last week to the plans for a World Council of Churches initiated at the international Christian conferences held at Oxford and Edinburgh in 1937, and agreed to be represented on it. Sixty Churches have now taken similar action, including the Church of Scotland, the Free Churches in England, and many of the Churches in the Dominions, the United States, France, Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, and a number of the younger Churches in India, China and other parts of the world. The Orthodox Churches in the Balkans were represented at the conferences at Oxford and Edinburgh, and their interest in the plan will be stimulated by the decision of the Church of England. The Council already has a Provisional Committee, some of the members of which met since the war began (C.N.-L. No. 13), and a staff. While in present circumstances its sphere of activity is restricted, its existence is a symbol of the unity of Christians which must take growing shape if the Church is to serve the world in days to come. It is an encouragement in these dark days to know that when peace is restored to the world the means are present to draw together the Christian forces in different countries in the fulfilment of their common Christian purpose.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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